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Talking Points for the DCI
(3 January 1984)

LEBANON UPDATE

Tensions between the Lebanese Army and opposition militias remain high in the wake of the Army's successful sweep of the Sabra and Shatila camps in Beirut. The Israeli airstrikes against Palestinian targets near Bhamdun this morning will also increase the apprehensions of many opposition groups. Fighting along the traditional confrontation lines in the mountains, however, has been limited to sporadic shelling during the past week.

- The winter weather probably will prevent any major ground operations outside of the capital until March.
- Further MNF withdrawals---such as the proposed 25 percent cutback of French forces and the 50 percent cutback of Italian forces---or any Army moves toward southern Beirut, however, would spark a new round of street fighting, which could spread to the airport vicinity and threaten US Marine positions.

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We believe that the lull in the fighting has enabled many of the armed groups in Lebanon to strengthen their positions.

- Beirut-based Muslim militias continue to recruit and arm new fighters. Alarmed by the prospect of new Army moves into southern Beirut, these militias may be more likely to cast aside their differences to present a unified opposition.
- Palestinian rebels, freed from the Tripoli fighting by Arafat's departure, probably will reinfiltate the Beirut area with Syrian encouragement. reports that Fatah rebels have arrived in southern Beirut and are organizing opposition to the government.

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A Western military attache recently reported sighting a Syrian surface-to-air SA-8 missile transloader in the Matn area, possibly indicating the presence of at least one SA-8 battery.

- These missiles, effective against high-speed tactical aircraft such as US reconnaissance planes, have not been previously detected west of the Bekaa Valley. The presence of SA-8s along Syrian frontlines in Lebanon would indicate a greater Syrian capability to defend against future airstrikes.

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Assad's decision to release Goodman probably reflects a political calculation that Syria had little to gain from holding him. Jackson's visit provided Assad with an opportunity to gain

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[redacted]

some propaganda advantage with a gesture to US public opinion and to put a stop to any expectation in Damascus that Goodman's capture would pay major dividends. [redacted]

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Terrorism

Various sources continue to report possible attacks against MNF forces by radical Shia groups. These reports have suggested a wide range of conceivable targets and methods of attack, including explosive-laden trucks, armored personnel carriers, gliders, and helicopters. [redacted]

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- Many of these reports are probably spurious. Nonetheless, it is likely that radical Shia groups, convinced that their recent bombings have forced MNF governments to consider withdrawing their forces, will undertake further attacks in the near future. [redacted]

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Status of Reconciliation Efforts

There has been no significant movement towards the goal of reconciliation between the Lebanese government and opposition leaders. Druze leader Walid Junblatt and Shia leader Nabih Barri continue to demand that President Gemayel deal with the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon before any progress can occur on other issues.

- Both Junblatt and Barri insist that recent events---such as the Lebanese Army sweep in Beirut and the Israeli crackdown in Sidon---have hardened their resolve and diminished their willingness to compromise with the Gemayel government. These events are also causing many Sunni Muslims to join the opposition.
- Christian leaders, angered by a series of recent bombings of Christian-owned businesses, have little incentive to make concessions to the Druze and Muslims. They hope to prevent President Gemayel from being too forthcoming in any future talks with the opposition. Many right-wing Christians, convinced that Lebanon is moving toward permanent partition, are determined to retain Christian control of Beirut and the Maronite heartland north of the capital. [redacted]

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Despite several meetings in Damascus between Lebanese government representatives and Junblatt, no comprehensive cease-fire arrangements have been agreed upon. Junblatt is reported to be in a particularly self-confident, unyielding frame of mind. [redacted]

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Southern Lebanon

Muslims throughout southern Lebanon have participated in general strikes during the past week to protest heavy-handed

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Israeli security measures, such as arrests of religious leaders, searches of mosques, and the closing of the Awwali River bridges that link the south with the rest of Lebanon.

-- Even moderate Sunni and Shia leaders have endorsed civil and armed resistance to Israeli occupation.

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